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NEW BOOKS REVIEWED.

BY LOUISE COLLIER WILLCOX, HENRY LOOMIS NELSON AND
GRACE ISABEL COLBRON.

"A SOVEREIGN REMEDY."*

AMONG the novels of this year, Mrs. Steel's stands out as not only of value in itself, but as tending in a new and hopeful direction. If the purpose of fiction be to divert, as we are so volubly and frequently reminded, yet the modes of entertainment are two; one may shift the burden of the personal life by confining oneself in something smaller, or one may forget oneself by entering into a fuller and a wider circling interplay of human currents. To those who prefer the ampler treatment, the turn of the fashion to a larger structure is devoutly to be welcomed.

It has been said that "were a God to tell his life, he would do so in two words."

"He lives full life who never thinks of life;
He is half dead who ponders life and death."

It is, however, the business of the novel to ponder life and death and to portray the shifting circumstance of human existence.

The slight novel of the fashion now passing concerned itself with the principal character, his vicissitudes, triumphs and associations; it avoided daintily any deep delving and stepped warily over the most even of surfaces. But it was as possible that it should become a bore in its kind as that an uninterrupted perusal of the encyclopædia might be so, in another.

Mrs. Steel is not a young woman; she has passed middle age, is a mother and a grandmother, has lived a full and varied life in different quarters of the globe, and has, as we may easily trace, never spared herself investigation or part-playing. She

* "A Sovereign Remedy." By Flora Annie Steel. Doubleday, Page & Co., 1907.

comes to her task with a mind well furnished, with a habit of skilled observation, and with the wide outlook of one who has in the fullest way lived threescore years.

In some ways, notably in the matter of plot-structure, "*A Sovereign Remedy*" is not so finished a work as "*On the Face of the Waters*," but it is a larger book dealing with more vital and more abstract subjects. The mechanism seems at times awkward, and at others it verges upon fantasticality. She has drawn together the folk of a Welsh village, an English peer and his circle of relatives, a heroine who is the outcome of a strange experiment in education, a vigorous and pushing young clerk of the lower middle class, several unscrupulous financiers, and has shown the interplay of life with life. Her types are distinct and well drawn, none better, perhaps, than the sharp-tongued, keen-witted servant, Martha, and the old gardener, Adam.

If one compare this book with an old-fashioned novel, with "*Middlemarch*," for example, one finds it not quite so well-covered a canvas. Mrs. Steel introduces four love-affairs, interesting and distinctly wrought out, two ending in marriage, one in tragedy and deterioration, and the principal one ending in the more satisfactory and final solution of death, so that we may feel that for the lovers the personal dream and its illusions are blotted out or else that they are in some way united and acquiescent.

As against this "*Middlemarch*" has for its love interests, the affairs of Mary Garth, Rosamund Vincy, Celia Brooke and poor Dorothea's complicated relations to Casaubon, Sir James, Lydgate and Ladislaw, and there are as well Rosamund's flirtations with Ladislaw and Lydgate's cousin and the rector's disappointed love for Mary Garth, making, in all, ten emotional threads of which we must keep the ends in hand. We have as theme the threefold influence of woman as siren, angel of the house and saint. Of moral problems we have the clashing claims of comfort and science in Lydgate, the perplexities of futile learning and faint performance in Casaubon, the difficulties of ordinary honesty in Bulstrode, the shrinkage of meanness and stinginess in the old miser, and the whole problem of aspiration and use and wont in Dorothea and various minor problems. In Mrs. Steel's novel the themes are fewer and not quite so fully worked out. We have the function of judgment in religion, the deleterious effects of religious emotionalism upon uneducated people, the

debasement of money (which is indeed the main theme and lends the book its title), and the vague encroachment upon the material world of those powers not yet accounted for in the dreams of our philosophy. So that the novel while it is larger and more significant than the current novel, cannot yet claim to have reached in bulk and significance to the standards of the great novels of a past generation.

Still, there are many things for which we are deeply grateful to Mrs. Steel as we lay her book down. One is that the stress upon the emotional side of life is not overemphasized. Another is the vividness and charm, amounting at moments to lyric rapture, with which she depicts the Welsh hills and that far-away island in the group of the Sporades. We get from her sentences the scent of the winds, the vision of the flower-covered floor of earth, the shifting clouds, the very touch of the soft air on the skin as well as a liberal feeling for action. We are set free from the trammels of the individual life with its purpose and passion, its thwarting and finality, and come to a fuller sense of life playing over into death, of death overlapping and covering life, of the part turning in the whole and the whole beneficently engulfing the part.

LOUISE COLLIER WILLCOX.

THE STUDY OF INTERNATIONAL LAW.*

As Secretary Root well says in his prefatory paper to the first number of the "American Journal of International Law": "The increase of popular control over national conduct, which marks the political development of our time, makes it constantly more important that the great body of the people in each country should have a just conception of their international rights and duties."

Further on he says: "One of the chief obstacles to the peaceable adjustment of international controversies is the fact that the negotiator or arbitrator who yields any part of the extreme claims of his own country and concedes the reasonableness of any argument of the other side is quite likely to be violently condemned by great numbers of his own countrymen who have never taken the pains to make themselves familiar with the merits of

* "The American Journal of International Law." A Quarterly. Vol. I. First Quarter: The American Society of International Law.